

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 1082

By Brown

A RESOLUTION to recognize and honor the past and present members of the Fisk University Jubilee Singers.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that members of this General Assembly should pause to honor those artists who, through their extraordinary singing talents, have brought and continue to bring great renown to the State of Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee's history is rich with musical traditions ranging from the bluegrass music of the Appalachian Mountains, to country music with its home in Nashville, to the world-renowned jazz and blues music of in Memphis; and

WHEREAS, the first internationally acclaimed African American singing group, the Fisk University Jubilee Singers introduced "slave songs" to the world and preserved this music genre throughout the years; and

WHEREAS, the original nine members of the Jubilee Singers toured the United States and Europe in 1871, raising funds to construct Fisk University's first permanent building, Jubilee Hall, which is now designated a National Historic Landmark by the United States Department of the Interior; and

WHEREAS, a beautiful Victorian Gothic building, Jubilee Hall houses a ceiling-to-floor painting of the original nine Jubilee Singers commissioned by Queen Victoria of England; and

WHEREAS, an original member of the Jubilee Singers, Green E. Evans was a Republican member of the House of Representative from Shelby County during the 44th General Assembly (1885-1887); and

WHEREAS, Green E. Evans was one of the most famous members of the original Jubilee Singers, and he was also an accomplished teacher and businessman; and

WHEREAS, the Jubilee Singers continue this great tradition of African American music, performing for diverse audiences and traveling extensively; and

WHEREAS, Paul T. Kwami, a native of Ghana, is the current Director of the Fisk University Jubilee Singers; he started his musical training very early, studying piano, violin, music theory, and conducting under the tutelage of his father; and

WHEREAS, leaving home to attend high school and college, Mr. Kwami, graduated from the Music Education program at the National Academy of Music in Wenneba, Ghana; he then taught at the Academy for six years before moving to the United States; and

WHEREAS, a 1995 graduate of Fisk University, Paul Kwami was a member of the Jubilee Singers under former Director McCoy Ransom from 1983 to 1985; upon graduation, Mr. Kwami pursued further musical studies at Western Michigan University; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Kwami became Director of the Jubilee Singers in 1994, guiding and directing this estimable and historic singing group with the utmost professionalism and artistic passion; and

WHEREAS, the current members of the Fisk University Jubilee Singers include sopranos, Kawana Williams, Ashley Thomas, Jessica Williams, and Rashai Holmes; altos, Angela Stockdale, Dorian Chism, Jacqueline Patterson, and Jihan Murray-Smith; tenors, Wesley Trigg, Kyle Dickerson, Darrel Jones, and Willis Ware; basses, Eric Jenkins, Joshua Jeter, Devin Mikell, and Jermaine Dunn; alternates, Chastity Parker, Victoria Butler, Tramaine Parker, and Danielle Compton; and

WHEREAS, the Jubilee Singers have performed at many prestigious venues and historical institutions, including the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, the Bicentennial Celebration of the State of Tennessee, the opening of the Adelphi Coliseum, the United Nations' Race Against Poverty Awards, the National Association for Black Culture Centers, the National Alliance of Black School Educators, the Tennessee Legislative Black Caucus Reception, the Smithsonian Institute, and the Kennedy Center; and

WHEREAS, the Jubilee Singers have received the Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award, and were inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame in 2000; and

WHEREAS, the Jubilee Singers were the focus of a PBS presentation of *The American Experience* titled, “Jubilee Singers: Sacrifice and Glory”, which explored the group’s historical, musical, and cultural impact upon the United States; and

WHEREAS, the Fisk University Jubilee Singers, under the direction of Paul T. Kwami, released a multi-media package titled, *In Bright Mansions*, which was nominated for a Grammy for Best Recording Package in 2004; and

WHEREAS, *In Bright Mansions* is a collection of eighteen a cappella spirituals; these historical songs capture the essence, beauty, and truth of Scripture and the African American experience, providing a source of encouragement and hope; and

WHEREAS, the Fisk University Jubilee Singers and Curb Records permitted *In Bright Mansions* to be used on the Secretary of State’s History website which features information about the fourteen African American legislators who served in the Tennessee General Assembly during the 19th Century; and

WHEREAS, this legislative body finds it appropriate to honor and recognize the past and present members of the Fisk University Jubilee Singers for their meritorious service to the African American community, the good people of the State of Tennessee, and the citizens of this great Nation; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we recognize and honor the past and present members of the Fisk University Jubilee Singers for their unflagging commitment to perform and preserve slave spirituals, commend their excellence and talent as vocal artists, applaud their meritorious service to the good people of the State of Tennessee, and wish them every success in all future endeavors.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.